

## Four steps to good health: Time to get loud about preventing a “silent killer.”



“Silent killer” sounds like the title of a bad horror movie. For doctors, though, it’s code for a condition that has few obvious symptoms but can be deadly. While the term was coined for high blood pressure, another condition that puts people at high risk for heart attacks and strokes is competing for the title. (Talk about a dubious distinction!) About 40 percent of adults over 40 are thought to have metabolic syndrome, a cluster of three or more of the following risk factors: high triglycerides, a waistline circumference of more than 35 inches for women and 40 for men (regardless of body-mass index), low HDL cholesterol, high blood sugar, and high blood pressure. The good news is that while metabolic syndrome may be silent, the prescription for counteracting it is loud and clear.

- 1. Eat real food.** Vegetables, legumes, fish, fruit, olive oil, intact grains, nuts, herbs and spices...these are the foods that nourish us and support metabolic and overall health. Highly processed foods, refined flour and sugar, and manufactured oils never have and never will.
- 2. Just do it (really).** Both cardiovascular and resistance exercise can help prevent and reverse metabolic syndrome. Make exercise a game, make it a goal, make it a date, whatever it takes. Getting 150 minutes of moderately intense activity a week is ideal, but don’t fall into the all-or-nothing trap. If you can’t make your Zumba class or don’t have time for your 30-minute walk, take a few brisk loops around the block or do a few minutes of jumping jacks and push-ups. Something is always better than nothing.
- 3. Lose weight if you need to.** If you’re overweight, losing as little as 5 percent of your body weight can lower your heart disease risk by 20 percent.
- 4. Chillax.** For a lot of people, stress reduction should be step number one for the simple reason that it makes other beneficial habits much more likely. When you’re in a state of chronic stress, it’s easy to let healthy habits fall by the wayside. Chronic stress can also increase inflammation, which can fuel metabolic syndrome. A regular practice of meditation, yoga, tai chi is a fantastic way to work stress relief into your routine. When in doubt, just breathe: spending 5 minutes doing slow, deep breathing can trigger the body’s relaxation response.